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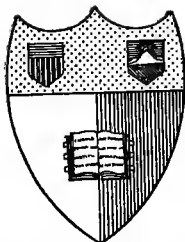
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LYRA MUTABILIS

BY
MORLEY ROBERTS

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Hunc sero tandem libellum

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PART I.
LYRA VITAE.

THE HOUSE OF REST.

DEDICATORY.

HOW few, how bitter few, I save
Of all my thoughts that bud and grow
To lay them on her lonely grave
Or keep to tell her when I go.

Yet in the sacred house of rest
It may be that she lies asleep,
Still holding to her loving breast
My thoughts before I learnt to weep.

THOUGHT AND FORM.

THE thought, perhaps, was mine
But the song the song of the birds,
For I sat in the wood and listened
And they brought me golden words.

I thought of Love and Life,
And the earth where the dreamer delves,
And the great books of the dead
Flew out of their silent shelves.

They taught me what they could,
I learned the little I may.
Perhaps a child may take me
Out of a shelf some day.

WHEN LIFE WAS BARE.

WHEN Life was bare
And Joy a ghost
For all you were
I loved you most.

I ask no star
The Why or How—
For what you are
I love you now.

ALL MY SONGS.

ALL my songs
Have fled away :
All my words
Are turned to clay.

Again my pen
Is but a feather :
I can knit
No words together.

But the thoughts
Inside of me
Make you still
A melody.

HER GARDEN.

*If all her garden
Suffers change,
This flower will show
Blood-red and strange.*

Though Fate deny
All love to her
Within her heart
One thought will stir.

In years to come
She will recall
How he with nothing
Gave her all.

If Life no joy
Or blessing give
Still in her soul
This thought will live.

Bitter and sweet—
That dream will see
A thousand thousand
Dead thoughts be.

It must survive
Through all her pain
And in late peace
Shall bloom again.

*That flower shall show
Blood-red, yet pure,
And in her garden
Shall endure.*

•

REMEMBER ME.

REMEMBER me when all your world grows chill,
And that may surely be.

When none who loved you lives to love you still
Remember me.

We passed together through a gloom more deep
Than death itself can be,
So when your old companion lies asleep
Remember me.

Not faultless but not faithless unto you,
All that might given be
He gave with a full heart and this you knew :
Remember me.

When I am gone the way the others went,
Who wait so patiently,
And he who loved you is at last content
Remember me.

TO N.

SHE is soft—the gentlest She—
And as hard as ivory.
Full of help for sore distress
And entirely pitiless.
Wise as any and as sweet
And as bitter, to complete
All the many ways she shows.
She a rock is—and a rose,
Honey and a sharpened sting :
Brave and fearful. She can bring
Knowledge of remote romance
From the castles of old France,
Then you find her on her knees
Poring on Thucydides,
Or upon a fireside mat
With great Caesar and a cat.
Books she loves and books she hates :
Life embraces and abates
Half her love because it seems
Woven not from tissued dreams.

Machiavelli has more ruth
Yet she is so soft, forsooth,
That you wonder she forgives
Any bitterness that lives.
She is calm—and a cyclone,
And in one short hour is blown
Half a hundred ways at least.
East is West and West is East !
With a south wind go they forth
Who at even meet the North
And as they begin to freeze
Find all summer at their knees.
She is earnest and once more
All its opposite : one door
To her mind seems folly blent
By the unintelligent.
And now, if any think they know her—
To help me, maybe they will show her.

THE COMPANION.

A DOWN the valley sweet and wild
Danced, for life was wild and sweet
And as I danced in starry meads
My shadow danced as wild and fleet.

My shadow my companion was
And more myself at times than I,
For he had thoughts that reached the stars
And when the sun went he would fly.

Then I was he, and both and one
Danced in the wilderness of night
Till day divided us once more
And drove my dreams away in flight.

I loved him dearly : he was more,
Much more, than I and wildly gay,
Until they told me who he was
And stole his secret life away.

And now my shadow is a ghost
And never any more can be
The dead companion of my youth
Who left the lonely world to me.

THE NIGHT ITSELF IS ALL
FORLORN.

SITH she has gone
The silly hours
Have minutes still
But no more flowers.

The morning gay
Is no delight,
Nor moves so sweetly
To the night.

The night itself,
Is all forlorn,
And dreams no longer
Of the morn

But frets itself,
A sad dull thing,
Where only joy
Is on the wing.

But somehow still
I think the hours
Will soon be fair
With opening flowers.

The morning too
Will be so light,
And sing as sweetly
As the night.

And night itself
Though now forlorn
Will bring her back
Some happy morn.

THE RETURN.

MY dear is coming back to-day :
What shall I say

Or how express

Past loneliness

To her who bids it fly away ?

Earth at the happy green of spring

Has birds to sing

And flowers that show

How well they know

That winter sere is vanishing.

But when the counted hours I sum

Cry, " she has come,"

Will a sweet bird

Or flower be heard

To speak for me if joy be dumb ?

Ah, if I were a nightingale

Or lily pale,

I'd sing or shine

So gay and fine

That words would seem of less avail.

Poor gentle things that cannot spell

The miracle

Of her return,

Ah me, or learn

To speak what she must know so well.

THE WISE THIEF.

HE is the wisest man
Who every wise man bleeds :
To know is not his aim,
His work takes all it needs.

The foolish ones are those
Who worship wisdom's throne,
But, to build a magic house,
Would never steal a stone.

By such no house is made
And none will ever be :
To build a great cathedral
Is more than honesty.

The maker builds for joy :
He steals for the home of a star,
And the robbed are as rich as they were
And the world is richer far.

THE LITTLE MAID.

AH, such a maid she was,
So sweet to see !
I loved her just because
Love came to me.

She wearied to be kind
To everyone,
And found, as her like find,
Much to be done.

So many needing love,
A little thought :
A word, a touch, to prove
All else is naught.

Ah, such a maid was she
So sweet ! And so
All that she was to me
No one can know.

THE CHILD BEARER.

NOUGHT so magical can be
As the thought within her now ;
Nature and Eternity
Sign themselves upon her brow.

All the passion of the past
Seems for this high purpose sent,
And her gentle soul at last
Savours a serene content.

MARY.

THE grief is ours : she is at rest,
Dear faithful heart, and so
Her end untimely leaves her blest,
As well the living know.

For they are blest who die the first ;
Thank Death ! they need not fear
The life-long hunger and the thirst
Of those who linger here.

SÖNNET.

TO W. H. HUDSON.

THE city's snare the citizen betrays
Till he forgets the earth : his gathered gold
Recks not of tilth or pasture or the fold
Nor how it sprang from men's laborious days :
Yet, as the streets resound and all their ways
Are thronged, the uplands and the deep-ploughed wold
Answer the summer's heat and winter's cold
And, on the downs, the shepherd stands at gaze.
Though unsubdued to the mysterious art
Which reckons life by means and not its end
My feet are tangled where I would not be,
Whilst you, by Nature led, seem set apart
To prove the earth, man's great forgotten friend,
Heals and forgives and sets the captive free.

SONNET.

TO J. G.

THERE is a sweetness in the lowland air,
The daisies are my friends, a sparrow's nest
Seems homelike to me, and the robin's breast
As lovely as a thought that eases care :
And yet full oft my meadows anywhere
Yield me no pasture and I may not rest
Till on some distant mountain's difficult crest
I find the peace a few have found in prayer.

Even so I cannot scorn the lowliest men
And deem no heart with virtue unimbued,
In hall or cot, by pasture rich or fen :
Yet would I sometimes follow those afar
Who stir me deeply from my daily mood,
And build their eyries where the eagles are.

HERITAGE.

ALL that I have is what I owe
All that I owe was given to me,
And whence my thoughts I do not know
Nor whose my heritage shall be.

I have no reason for my pride
In all my thoughts; my hopes, my fears,
As we toward Death together ride
Down the dark Avenue of Years.

Oh, fearful troop! Ye thoughts of those
Who gave me pride in fear, and strength
To see the opened years disclose
Their gifting powers to me at length!

For all I have is what I owe:
I give what all things gave to me,
And whence my thoughts I shall not know
Nor whose my heritage shall be.

FREEDOM.

LOVE never with the love that gains
 Advantage or the low desire,
Love with a passion full of pains
 Born in and purged by fire.

This is the love that faces death
 Yet fears it not nor any shame.
It draws no hesitating breath
 But leaps into the flame.

It sickens when advantage lies
 With what cold kisses simulate
The passion of the pleading eyes
 That truth could make so great.

For Love is freedom, and will break
 The very bars it strove to win,
Set free, it may return and make
 Its chosen home therein.

For never aught that raises man
 Was grown in prison save desire
For freedom since the world began
 Wherein we still suspire.

THE LAMP.

PUT not your faith in faith
Nor be so sure
That by the gates of death
It must endure.

New Gods for old show scorn
And bitter spite :
Creeds pass : to all their morn
Their noon, their night.

Yet Man endures : his will
Gives new creeds birth :
And one lamp, quivering still,
Lights the sad earth.

The Lamp of human care
For those above
The opening grave : for there
Kneels hopeless love.

NIGHT.

I RODE from the rising of the sun
Till day was done,
And I loosed my horse on the plain :
His was night and the dewy grass,
Sweet water his, the gift of the rain,
And hours of sleep that swiftly pass :
I loosed my horse to the night.

I ride my spirit from dawn of day
Till the light's away,
And I loose my soul with tears
Unto the night and the silver dew,
And peace in the dust of sacred years
And speech with the past still new :
I loose my spirit at night.

.

AN EPITAPH.

WHEN at his hour Death came to take me
I did not fear his voice and rave :
Since Life himself had failed to break me
I laughed with Death above my grave,
Shook hands with Death above my grave,
And never prayed a god should wake me.

I begged no god to scant his measure :
I wrestled Life for all I have :
I sought for no immortal treasure
To bribe my way beyond the grave
But sang and battled by the grave,
Wherein men lie and take their pleasure.

I took no ease in wild and clearing,
Desert or forest, plain or wave :
Beyond all sight and out of hearing
Of any prayers I dug my grave :
I smiled at Death beside my grave,
And laid me down at last, unfearing.

I laid me down, in peace reclining,
Without the laurels many crave :
My memories, like soft jewels shining,
Lay at my heart and lit my grave,
They lit and warmed my happy grave :
I laid me down without repining.

PART II.
LYRA AMORIS.

LINES.

I DO not ask that she should be
Divine in beauty: that her eyes
Should bring salvation, Paradise,
To any other man but me.

Let her at least be kind. I know
She will be lovely being so.
But that her soul should be divine,
Not wholly, yet far more than mine
I ask that humbly, and would claim
A certain equal cheerfulness,
A steady and unchanging flame
To warn my heart when cold distress
Comes down upon me like a cloud.

And if this be by heaven allowed,
Of her full soul let one part lie
Even beyond me, for desire
For ever feeds my heart with fire
When I am linked with mystery.

FAILURE.

ALAS, that man who is so fine
So strong and yet so delicate
Should lack the strength that's most divine
To rise above his low estate
And be no slave to love or hate.

Alas, that he whose gifts are such
That he might reach the starry skies
Should find the little earth too much
And faint and fail and never rise ;
Alas, that he should miss the prize !

Alas, that he whose love is great
Whose thoughts are good, who strives to be
Worthy and purely passionate
Should seek and work in vain and see
The soul he loves in misery.

But most he grieves that still he must
Find simple faith so rare a thing
That, even while he strives to trust,
He views his faith, which once could wing
The way to heaven, lie withering.

THE CAGE.

PASSION is an iron cage
Where imprisoned Love doth rage,
Beating on those iron bars,
Hungering for the wind and stars.

Ah, how sweet if love were mild
Nor by madness so beguiled !
If at last Life set him free
From the Tower of Jealousy.

When a lover rides away
Who is left should still be gay.
Should a mistress's unfaith
Open up the House of Death ?

Sweet affection in the sun
Like a singing stream will run :
But fierce Love in Passion's cage
Must an endless warfare rage.

BIRTH OF LOVE.

WE have kissed a thousand times
In a thousand ages and climes,

For the love that binds us two
Never so suddenly grew ;

It once was a hidden spell
Unspoken till Life befell,

When we first as spirits saw
With a strange delightful awe

That life would give us birth
When he had prepared the earth :

So at last when the earth began
And out of the beasts came man

We were begotten and given
The gifts of the earth and heaven.

THE BEGGARMAN.

IN sooth 'twas passing strange to see
That beggarman.
Tho' sack he wore and took his dole
He was a strangely seeming soul
And sat beside the pillared door
Where bright attendants of the queen
Passed to the marble of the floor
Where none but rich clad folks were seen.
And as he sat
And held his hat
And as he cried to those who came
His eyes shot fire
Of strange desire
That flickered like a windy flame.
In sooth! I swear the Beggarman
Was little like the begging clan.

Within the walls
Whose lofty halls
Were white and bright with casements large
For sun and air

The queen was. Fair
As any lily of the marge
Of any lake in any hills
She was, God wot :
A man could not
Have made in any of the mills
Of fancy's thought
A fabric thus
Of white and gold
The which to fold
When amorous
The ruddy heart of love that beats
Like wings the empty air, and seats
The wingéd man
Upon the tree
Where ripe desire
Like sunset's fire
Is free, is free !

But in this earth, this barren earth
Where beggarmen may sit them down
And grind dark thoughts in famine's dearth
Of charity in any town :
It is not strange
The very queen
Would wish to change,
If it had been

Within the law,
Her body fair
For such a beggar's sitting there ;
For you must know, who nothing know
But bandy idly to and fro
Dead things for live ones, that her quick
And sudden spirit grew so sick
Of awed obeisance and the bonds
Which bind great souls that break like seas
Till they are quiet weedy ponds,
That even she was fain to seize
A moment of her guarded time
And breathe the air ; her feet would climb
Even as she sat, a mountain slope,
And when she slept her soul would cope
With problems that the beggarman
Could draw in dust
And so expound
True nature on the natural ground,
As beggars must
Who hope to earn
The right to live and right to learn.

So now within, as you may see,
There was the queen's bright company ;
The chanting company who chant
“ Oh this God can, and this God can't ! ”

And settle laws with which to bind
Disorder, and the simple mind
Of him or her that cannot see
Why this or that should always be.
And so it chanced that from a book
The queen did look
And at the very portico
Where painted puppets in a row
Were wont to stand, she saw an odd
Preposterous thing allowed by God,
A real live man in beggar's dress.
She saw him, for in all the press
He made a dark spot, and his eye
She caught : Dear Heaven what ails the queen,
It must be, yes, the beggarman.
“ Oh why, oh why ”
The courtiers cry,
“ Does any land allow the clan
To mock our decent order ? ” Straight
They bade him pass beyond the gate.
But as he stood, and never moved
They feared to touch him, till reproved
By their own force, they courage got.
When sudden : “ Courtiers, touch him not.”
Alas, alas, the evil eye
Of this strange man hath charmed the queen

Such things before had never been.
"Bring him before me. It is I
That speak." And so the beggar came.
What palace can forget its shame
When beggarmen tread haughtily
Among a glittering company ?

Oh, never think,
Because her voice
Was strangely strong, she did not shrink
To know her inmost heart rejoice :
To feel her blood,
Whose ordered flood
Rebelled at gates, had broken down
A barrier made
By Median law.
But bravely looking forth she saw
The beggarman who asked for alms.
Who asked, nay, kneeling down, he prayed,
With strange bright eyes and clasped palms.

Why was the innocent queen afraid ?
How should a crown so fear the bowl ?
Two emblems these of state and soul.
For had she not the ancient right
Of queenly power
Within her bower ?

Ah, ye are wrong, no fears of might
Could touch her soul, but pity now
Of him none pitied wrung her heart.
For her high coronation vow
Had set her soul and self apart,
 And tho' to live
 A soul must give,
The law set bounds to charity.
Besides who knows what gifts may be
Or how they work or weal or woe?

Then in a voice full sweet and low
The gentle queen spake to the man,
"Oh is there aught I may or can
To help you? answer, let me know."
And straight the beggar unashamed
Rose up full proudly and exclaimed:
"This day to eat and drink with thee."
A-trembling fell the company,
A palsy shook the painted throng;
From sufferance came this hideous wrong,
A beggarman, ye heavens above
What next? Will he demand her love?

Oh, pity for the queen's estate,
Oh, is it queenly to be great
And yet be bound in stubborn chains?

Full was her soul of fierce new pains,
For surely all her sympathy
Was with the bold presumptuous man
Who begged yet looked as loftily
As even any monarch can.
The truth to say she could but scan
His form and features to be sure
She should not though her days endure
Beyond all limits ever see
Another beggar such as he.
For all his rags he looked a king,
So thought perchance Penelope.

When sudden, "Let the people bring
The best there is." The queen thus spoke.
The courtiers vanished like thin smoke
Before a wind. And down they sat
The queen and beggarman together.
Surely a crown is but a hat
Tho' little good against the weather,
And now I pray you if you can
Interpret me the Beggarman.

LOVE SONG.

HER lips are white, her cheeks are white
Her bosom white to see
And whether she comes at noon or night
She wanly looks at me.

No lily blanched in the thick of a wood
Is half as white as she,
The moon on a corpse half rolled in a shroud
By a grave would warmer be.

Her hands are as thin as a shaking leaf
That's left on a winter tree ;
Her neck bends like a bending sheaf
When the rain falls heavily.

She never speaks—Oh ! if she spoke
What would she say to me
To make my white heart that she broke
Beat fast again and free ?

THE VISION.

NO lily, nor the blossom of the rose,
No, nor the vacant moon, or self set stars
Shall emblem her in her sufficiency.

The grace that marks the noblest, and the light
That is their sun, is neither light nor grace
To her strange wonder and comparison.

The volumed past of all the thought of things
Eternity unwritten and unknown,
Have not nor can have aught to say of her.

The days that ripen now like trees whose seed
Is set apart unsowed, shall have no fruit
To balance with her till the end of time.

Like none she is whose dear humanity
Hangs like a crown of thorns about her brows.
Like none she is. I would not have her like.

You dear sweet women whom I loved so much
Whose arms were fetters and whose hairs were cords
Stronger than fetters, what strange things ye seem.

Strange by your likeness to myself. I swear
My transfused blood would never stop your hearts,
In truth its passion might increase your own.

Your lips are kin unto my own male mouth,
Within your eyes I see myself again,
The words you speak you learnt from Life like me.

I love you ; aye, and so I love the day,
The reckoned, almanacked, appointed moon,
The sun, the usual sea, the expected air.

But she is of no order : hath no law :
Beholds no sister in you : finds me like
No brother as you may. And this is Love.

WHY.

PERHAPS when we are dead, my sweet,
Our thin white ghosts may chance to meet
Yet still go on and vainly sigh
And wonder why.

For your last farewell will be sweet,
And Death will say, "They shall not meet !
Or if they yearn in passing by
Shall wonder why."

And my lost heart will beat and beat
Unanswered then by lips so sweet
That quail in kissing now and sigh
And wonder why.

And I who know I am more sweet
Than Passion and Delight that beat
Their barren wings and go, must sigh
And echo "Why ?"

We ask it now, and now repeat
That bitter judgment on the sweet
Award of Love that makes us sigh
And wonder why.

But then there shall be nothing sweet
And we shall burn with ceaseless heat
And vain desires that pass not by
We know not why.

For tho' we know that something sweet
Leads on our burnt and weary feet
We shall for ever come not nigh
The reason why.

Yet though the earth be sometimes sweet
The pains of Hell can but repeat
The pain with which we lovers cry
When asking why.

GHOSTS.

STEADY, be still, be still and calm, that wraith
The white ghost of a red sin which you see
Is nothing more than comes all day to me
All day and night. Hear you the words it saith ?
I mark them hourly, even now its breath
Breathes in my ear, but then I know a host,
This is but one ; each human hath its ghost
Of a dead self lamenting broken faith.

These others, they are calm : you think, I know,
No trouble haunts them. Take this word for truth
Your father, mother, brother and your friend .
When they speak blithely and the brisk words go
Past your white face they see some ghost of youth,
Some sin, some shame, or sin and shame that blend.

LOVE AND THE WORLD.

NOW let it go; the world is more than vain,
Its windy words and wrath and all it gives
Are surely less than shining Love which lives
In tears of passion like the bow in rain :
You know I suffer : but to live again
Without this anguish would be worse than breath
Drawn hourly in disease and dread of death,
And for what life gives we must pay—in pain.

I let it go, and see the world depart
Down the long wind unsighed for, and to thee
For all thou hast been, yea, and all thou art,
Turn for my recompense for misery,
And all I lose, or may lose, is to me
Less than one lost throb of thy faithful heart.

GRIEF.

AH, grief grows beautiful in growing old,
Being no more the dreadful thing she seemed
For what she speaks is but as if we dreamed
So gentle is her mien who once was bold,
And we who wept so sorely to behold
Her onward footsteps, or to feel the touch
Of her strong fingers, fear her not so much
As her departure, lest we too grow cold.

She sits beside us and her voice at last
Fails to a wordless song of melody
As sweet as rippling seas when storms are past,
For tho' Fate smite me by the land and sea
His skies are not for ever overcast
And those whom I remember live for me.

THE PERFECT HOUR.

GIVE me a perfect hour
When the golden minutes run
Like the sea's bright waves which flower
In foam for the wind and sun !

And when that hour is sent
To make my soul sublime
I will build me a monument
To outlast the end of time.

And the monument shall be
But the few weak words I had
To tell all Eternity
How once a man was glad.

And all who know of this
Will never forgive the sun
For counting an hour of bliss
And evermore yielding none.

PART III.
LYRA FEMINEA.

THE VIRGIN.

I WISH I had a child,
A little noisy elf,
I might then be beguiled
From thinking of myself.

But now the whole day's light
I think the thoughts I must,
And they come again at night
Like clouds of choking dust.

For I am all alone,
I cannot halve my fears,
And when I lie and moan
At night there's no one hears.

I have no man to share
My fearful narrow bed,
To kiss my wasting hair,
Or stroke my aching head.

I never had my man :
This night where doth he lie ?
No other woman can
Love him as much as I.

Yet some have looked at me
As though they were half-won
To dream that I might be
The mother of their son.

But I never understood
What lies my life beguiled ;
I wish I had not been good
But had my little child.

SECRETS.

MY secret thoughts
Less secret are
Than those I show
To sun and star.

They're in the core
Of every mind.
Look in your own
And seek and find.

The thoughts I utter .
Only teach
How far away
Each is from each.

THE GOODLY STREET.

MY heart lay groaning on my bed,
My fearful thoughts crouched on the ground,
For I had bitter dread of love
And passion, hunting like a hound.

My red heart failed outside my breast,
I had no heart inside to beat,
As I saw the sacred hunting hound
Come questing down my virgin street.

My thoughts I gathered up in haste
And dropped them weeping into fire ;
I shut my sullen window close
Against the hound of love's desire.

I took my pale heart to my breast,
I gathered ashes of each thought ;
And safe I walk the goodly street,
The bitter street of Good-for-Naught.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

THE living may love the dead
When their gift of life is done,
But the half-dead have no friends
And now I have scarcely one.

Yet never a word I said
When they stared and went away,
For how can the half-dead speak
And what can their dry lips say?

Life is a thing one spends
And I have no more to give.
So the living turn to the living
And the half-dead do not live.

FRIENDS.

OF all your friends I find this true :
Their love will just so long endure
As there is mirth and help in you
To make their comfort more secure.

Yet one I know is always mine,
There may be two, that for my head
Bring sacring oil and holy wine—
Gifts to the living from the dead.

DESPAIR.

MY little beauty fades away,
None but myself bids it to stay.

My hair grows thin : it's not so long :
Nothing but kisses could keep it strong.

My little breasts they wither so :
For only love could make them grow.

The pleasant curves about my knee
Are dead of thirst and jealousy.

I see my cheeks, my throat and chin
Die for the love that some call sin.

My sister's beauty, who has it not,
Is still as great in one man's thought.

But no man's thought my body sees,
And no man's lips have kissed my knees.

I have been naught : I've nothing done :
I've not been lost and not been won.

THE WEEPING MOTHER.

MY little maid was sweet
And trim and fleet
And to those dull dead rooms
She brought perfumes,
Roses,
Aye, her fair cheeks
Were such as one supposes
In naiads, or in oreads in their mountains.
Her eyes were fountains
And I, drugged hard with many a book
To lull my aching soul to sleep,
My labours half forsook
To talk with her, and presently to weep.

I saw her roses go.
Thus autumn comes
With foot at first aglow,
Then heavy she, and slow,
The glory of the summer all benumbs,
And so my maid grew pale
And seemed to ail
As if some terror came to mar
The glory of the sun and her lone star.

I saw her heaven cloud,
Beheld her bowed
With something hard to tell,
Something intolerable.
And yet and yet
She was more sweet
And more complete
Although I, too, beheld the ghost
She feared, and I. It was too true,
They fail who love the most.
I saw chill fear bedew
Her paling cheek,
And yet I could not speak
I, who had been too strong
And parted Love and Life, too long, too long !

And then one day
Oh, bitter day and dear !
I heard my little maid, a maid no more,
Outside my door,
Weeping in shame and fear
While she who held that sombre house in thrall
Stood bellowing in the hall.
Most bestial, coarse of wit,
Mouthed like a bladder slit,
Servile, sagacious in the meanest theft,
Scrag-necked, flat-bosomed, and accurst,

The vilest virgin left
In all our village, and she said her worst.
She called her "slut" and "drab"
Each word a jab
Of poison. And my face grew like a flame
(Oh, if I'd had her little victim's shame!)
I pulled the door wide open and drew in
That child of human sin.
I looked just once at her who used her tongue.
I looked: I saw her quail,
Almost grow pale.
And angrily I flung
The door to, and my little maid
Then came to me,
And almost unafraid,
She bowed,
Weeping not loud,
Her sacred head upon my trembling knee.
I stroked her hair and blessed her child unborn
And from my misery
And her distress
I brought her comfort, even I, forlorn
In self-imposed utter barrenness.
I held her to my aching childless heart,
She was a part
Of me, and I, half mother that I felt,

Beside her knelt.
She told me all she could ;
I understood,
And that was like a saving miracle ;
But I, the virgin, shook
To read her book
And know it all so well, so wildly well !

Outside that woman spoke of drabs and men
And harlots once again,
That I might understand that her intent
Was moral, insolent.
My little maid's small box she forced, and strowed
Upon the ground
Things that she found,
The baby clothes that child,
In bitter nights beguiled
To labour in her grief and fear, had sewed

I set the door wide open And that day
I took the child away.
Her man I said I'd be
Till he returned from wandering on the sea.
And thus it was she blessed me,
Even me !

DEATH.

YEARS ago my body died
But my murder was concealed :
That my soul was crucified
Only now have I revealed.

For my body, fine and sweet
Soon an iron cage became,
And my soul shut up in it
Leapt in sacrilegious flame.

Yet it soon must cease from woe,
They will say I am resigned
When to their church again I go
With my quiet murdered mind.

On their altar I shall put
All my bitter heart of ice,
Life that I trod underfoot
As a social sacrifice.

They will say God hears my prayer,
He who never answered one,
He who bleached my waning hair
And watched my own self-murder done !

HOPE.

ONE thing I hate
And then no more,
That ever still
Beats at my door.

I hear her knock,
She shakes the bars
That close my house
On wind and stars.

Ghosts I endure ;
The thoughts of all
My dearest dead
I can recall.

I might have peace
My house within
Did she not come
Who's not my kin.

But this strange child,
That's ever one,
Spurs those towards life
Who would be done.

I fear not death,
With life I cope,
The thing I dread
Is human Hope.

THE FOOL.

I TOLD the fools
What fools they were :
They laughed at me
And my despair.

They took their joy
Where it might be
And kissed again
And laughed at me.

I told the wise
How wise they were
That they might help
Me in despair.

And when they stooped
To share with me
All that they knew
Was misery.

THE MENTAL HARLOT.

I LOVED a friend
She loved not me :
For all she did
Was harlotry.

Her radiant hair,
Her winning face,
Made any room
A goodly place.

Slender was she
And strong and lithe,
Her lips were red,
Her words were blithe.

She used my heart
To deck her board ;
Her own was hollow
Like a gourd.

She stole my gifts .
And took their tilth :
She drank my blood
And ate my health.

With both white hands
She scooped my brains
She made my gold
Her secret gains.

She sucked my life
And left me clay
And then she laughed
And went her way.

But still I think
She was so sweet;
In Hell I'll say so
When we meet.

THE ROAD.

WE learn and in our learning
We break more hearts than one,
For the road which has no turning
Leads downward from the sun.

And if, towards darkness going,
Our wounds seem like to heal
'Tis not our wisdom growing,
'Tis age that cannot feel.

THE FRIEND.

I LOVED a friend
And she loved me
With all her heart's
Sincerity.

I gave to her
All that I could
She gave me more—
She understood.

For Life had given
Her all it may :
She proved her joy
And had her day.

Love, and a friend
She kept them till
The end of joy
And keeps them still.

She never bowed
Her drooping head
Beside a tomb
Uncomforted.

And now I have
No friend, and I
Must live too long
Before I die.

Ah, happy she
In this great boon,
To live and love
And die so soon.

QUATRAIN.

MY wisest thoughts, like water sunk in sand,
Have none to drink them, none to understand :
My nearest thoughts are those I never tell
Because the world would understand too well.

TIME.

OF all the past I made a friend :
I never knew I had begun,
Nor did I dream that all things end
Beneath the sun.

But why the future secret seemed
I did not understand at all,
Nor how it was no gateway gleamed
Within its wall.

And many, many, hours I'd sit
Wondering if it were like the past
And I could not remember it
But should at last.

THE HOUSE THAT STARES.

A COT to please
With roof of thatch,
A few old trees
Whose lichens match
My house and all the houses by :
For these I sigh !

A house that's big
And sheer and stark,
That cocks its wig
Across the Park
And stares (a thing I can't forgive)
Is where I live !

THE GREAT PLAY.

IN the Great Play that's never done
I have my part, a splendid one.

In it I sing and dance and play
Or weep and laugh the live long day.

No one can take this part from me,
'Twas cast at my nativity.

For only Death who taketh all
Can end my hour majestic.

Each day's my flower, I watch it grow :
I love the blossoms as they blow.

I walk the paths my garden in
And watch the crowns my roses win.

What if I die and drift away,
What if I weep ? 'Tis in the Play !

I might have had an empty part
Without my children next my heart.

I might have owned no garden sweet,
No grass to cool my burning feet.

I might have lacked the gifts I'm given,
I might have seen no stars in heaven.

I might have lived, a lampless one
Who lit no candle at the sun.

I might have been too dull and slow
To watch with tears the young buds grow.

What if I'm sad when all alone
And in that winter make my moan?

For yet again Spring laughs with glee
And all my joy comes back to me!

I play I'm old and yet a child
For with life's magic I'm beguiled.

I know that Youth is old, so old,
But that the years new gifts unfold.

And as they open like a rose
The leaf-like days their joy disclose.

And if a canker spoils one bloom
The coming bud shall spill perfume.

For so I'll play the part I'm given
And for these gifts thank earth and heaven.

THE PERFECT HUSBAND.

THE perfect husband without doubt
Is not the man who cannot sin :
He waves his hand when he goes out
And kisses me when he comes in.

He is not certain I must know
His love is solid to the core :
He sometimes wants to tell me so
And every time I love him more.

I know, too well, my hair grows white
But when he often says, " I see
How beautiful you are to-night !"
My youth comes dancing back to me.

THE MOTHER.

IF I had been an angel
I'd have given away my wings
To get a little human house
And live with human things.

I would not cry for heaven
When love was on my stair :
I'd give the blessèd stars away
For earth if he were there.

The shining paths of Paradise
Are not so much to keep
As the three little stairs I tread
To watch my children sleep.

If I had been an angel
I'd give my splendid wings
To have one little human house
And live with human things.

THE CHILD.

MY little baby is so sweet
Her flower-like face and amber hair,
Her blessèd body and her feet
And all the thoughts she's hiding there.

My dear old Nanna doesn't know
Half that she says when we're alone.
I sometimes hope she will not grow
For now she's mine, my very own.

She is so wise, I don't know why,
Nor what it is she thinks about
But in our home my man and I
Have all the years to find it out.

TO-DAY.

MY child's long life
Is just one day :
From dawn to night
He has to play.

He's got no more
And so he cries
On going to bed
For then he dies.

My little life
Is only one
And when it's over
All is done.

I have no more
Than my short day
To live and love
And work and play.

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